

## [B. R. Pearson]

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Life history

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

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B.R. Pearson (Idaho Bill), 69, born July 28, 1868, West of the Mississippi River and on the Oregon Trail. Knut Pearson, his father, was a carpenter, stone and brick mason who built homes and cleared land for a promoter in this territory. He also owned a number of horses that he used to hunt buffalo. This gave Idaho Bill an opportunity to learn to ride a horse at an early age. He has spent his life around horses and held a number of rodeo contests in various parts of the country. His story:

"Well sir, my name is B.R. Pearson but I'm just old Idaho Bill to everybody. Now, I was born on July the 28th, 1868, somewhere West of the Mississippi River on the Oregon Trail. If anybody knows exactly where, they've got me bested a mile because my own family couldn't recall the place when I was a young buck. My dad's name was Knut Pearson. He was helping to clear up some land out there on the Oregon Trail for a promoter out of Blair, Nebraska, when I was born. He was a carpenter, stone and brick mason, so he helped to build lots of places. Of course, mighty little brick was used at first. [Most?] of that came

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later but there was stone building a-plenty. He hunted buffalo too, so he always had a hoss remuda with him and he taught me to ride a hoss as soon as I could possibly sit one.

I liked to ride so well that I could ride a pretty snaky hoss when I wasn't but 10 years old. In fact, I was a tolerable fair range hand at 11 and was working for Gordon Edgerton. He run a lot of cows North of the Republican River in Kansas. I was so young and that's so long ago that I don't recall whether he had a brand or not. The more I think on it, the more I doubt that he even had a brand because there was no other cattle close to us then. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 "I quit him and went to work for J. Johnson when I was 12. You know, When I look around me and see these college fellows and the kids of 12 these days, I wish I had a chance to show all of them how a real boy lived in those days. Kids nowadays have mufflers and all kind of things. I was living where the climate gets cold a-plenty and had to live in dugouts and caves when we found one. My good clothes were homespun and my working clothes were made from old tarps or any other thing that canvas was used in making. My food was nearly all beans and beef with black coffee boiled in a tin can. Many's the time that I had to take a big rock and bust the ice on the river or a crick to get some water to wash up and make my coffee with. I had to melt the ice itself when it was too thick to get to the water. I don't mean by this that there wasn't other men along but in order to have harmony, everybody had to pitch in and do everything that came to their hand to do. That way, our life was easier to live.

"Back to Johnson's place now. He run a lot of cattle along the Platte River and South of there. Not far from Fort Kearney, Kansas. He run several brands but the one I recall was a combination JHB. To make it, you run the letters together. That's called a combination brand.

"Well, while I was with Johnson, I began to busting wild hosses. I don't know but I was born with the knack of handling hosses I think. I always loved a good hoss and I loved to change a bronc's mind about not letting a fellow ride him. I stayed with Johnson for about three years before I went back to the home ranch Before I left, I was busting the worst

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hosses in the country. 3 "I almost forgot the trouble the Olives had while I was working for Johnston. The Olive gang came up from Texas with their big herds and settled tolerable close to Johnson's place. Now, that was alright because there wasn't no fences in those days and there was plenty of range for everybody. You couldn't hardly hog it because there was so much.

"Trouble started to pop when the Olives came in. There was so many cattle that all the water holes had to be clear. That is, they couldn't be fenced. Now, there was a few nesters around there and they hadn't fenced up anything so far. when the cattle started to running over their few acres of planted stuff, they began to fencing in the water holes and their plots. The Olives wouldn't stand hitched for this, which Johnson knew and he decided to just let them handle it because they had a rep for handling anything they didn't like.

"Well, the Olives warned the nesters but the nesters wouldn't back water. One of the Olives, I don't recall his name, went to a couple of them named Ketcham and Mitchell and told them he was the sheriff. [He?] also told them to get off the range before somebody got them, and to go back where they came from. These two fellows up and killed him, then the sho' 'nough sheriff came from Fort Kearney and started to jail with them.

"Now, the jails in those days wasn't much. You could just drop a rope on one of them and drag it off. That's what the cowpunchers on a spree usually did. The sheriff decided to take them to a real jail which was at Abilene, Kansas, I think. The Olives got their gang together and overtook the sheriff. They took his 4 prisoners away from him and burnt them at the stake. I heard an old timer say years after that, that they used at least five cord of wood on the fire. Of course, nobody could identify the men in the gang. Why, not even the sheriff could place a man. When, another Olive got killed in some mysterious way so that left old I.P. Olive. I guess he was so tough that they couldn't get him. He moved to Plum Crick, which has since been changed to Lexington. He's still living there today.

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"Before I went back to the Home ranch, I went to work for the Hat Ranch at Pocatello, Idaho. J.H. Bart owned it and had two brands. The hat brand was for the regular range cattle, then he had some high powered cattle that he imported from England. They were of a breed that is well known today but I just can't name it because it's high powered too. He used the combination upside down BHJ for these. The hat brand caused a lot of trouble because each state allowed one brand but they wouldn't cooperate. The result was that each state had a hat brand along with the others. I don't recall the number of head that Bart run but I expect it would shade 10,000 head alright.

"Well now, about the home ranch. Dad got to where he wanted me to go home for a spell so bad that he offered me a trip overseas if I'd do that. He'd piled up a little money because he made it on everything he turned to and didn't care much about spending it. He didn't drink or go hell-raising around. I don't care much for that kind of a life either. What he was afraid of was that I'd finally get in with a bunch of wet ropers. A wet roper that proved up was in a spot those days. He generally got light footed and ended his 5 days with his feet off the ground and a rope from a tree limb to his neck. Well, back to dad. Who in thunderation wouldn't quit most anything to get a trip overseas? Dad's place was a small ranch in Snake River Valley, about 50 miles from Caldwell, Idaho, and he only run from 100 to 200 head of cattle. That's the reason I wanted to go with the big companies where they had excitement everyday. I stayed on with him 'til the Fall of '86' cattle had been marketed, and then he let me go.

"Man! Man!, you just should have been with me! I had a high heeling old time after I got across. The going across wasn't so hot. I'd rode a lot of hosses but riding on the boat made me lose my temper along with my meals 'til I got used to it. We finally made it. Dad gave me a little over \$500.00 for spending money and a round trip ticket. Well, I'd walk down the boulevards with my spurs a-jingling, ornaments all over my deerskin vest, rattlesnake skin hat band on my big stetson, and even my holster strapped on. You see,

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they wouldn't let me wear my pistol. I guess the Frenchies was scared I'd get a wild hair in the butter and drop one of them. Maybe even thought I'd scalp one of them. Who knows?

"I didn't care though because I got plenty attention. I was wearing my goatee and mustache then just like I do now, and my hair was just as long. The only difference was that it was raven black then and powerful pretty. I'd get any woman that I crooked my finger for. I landed in France and went right to Paris. My money went farther then than it does now so I just canceled my return ticket and collected the money. My hardest job was in getting that parley voo stuff down. They was willing a-plenty to teach me. 6 "I run into an American promoter, I don't recall his name, and he got me to go with him in several of his exhibitions as an American cowpuncher. Well, it was an easy way to make money so I takes him on. I worked with him for a month or so, then went with several other promoters. Some of them even took me to the Northern part of Africa. One of those places that you can't pronounce the name. I don't even know whether or not I could point it out on the map but there wasn't anything to the places we went to. Dirty, scrubby people. I'll take the States everytime. I finally begun the year of '87 with Carl Hackensack's Winter Circus. He was touring Germany. I didn't go so many places with him because homesickness began to get me. I ended up by taking a tramp steamer back to the States. You tell 'em for me that there's no place like home. I was tickled plumb pink to get back.

"After I went home and got a little money to operate on, I went around to the different hoss ranches and bought up the hosses they couldn't bust. When I couldn't bust them, I kept them and took them to rodeo contests. The reason I said 'rodeo', was because that's what everybody says when they speak of a contest but the rider just says 'contest', and lets it go.

"Now, about the places I've been to contests. You might say that I've been to everyone of them that's very big and to a lot of the little ones. I don't recall those that I went to back of the 90's very well. One thing I did do back of the 90's was to sell the first hosses to the Pueblo, Colorado, fire department. I raised them hosses on my hoss ranch at Snake River

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Valley, located about 50 miles from Caldwell, Idaho. I inherited this place from 7 my dad. My love for good hosses caused me to convert the place into a hoss ranch and I've been glad I did ever since. I raise all kinds and breeds on the old place besides the big draught breeds. The ones I sold to the city of Pueblo was a big span of Cleveland Greys and a big span of Dapple greys. I busted them hosses myself and delivered them by rail. I stayed with them all the way, then broke them to the fire wagon. After I had an accident in El Paso in 1912, I took it easy and went around over the country. When I visited Pueblo, the papers there carried a feature story about me and the hosses.

"I don't recall the date but I also busted hosses for a couple of years for a hoss man by the name of N.F. Damron who operated at Denver, Colorado. He didn't have a brand of his own. After I quit him, I went to work for Goulding at Denver. He run the Union Stock Yards and Buchanan was the foreman. This Buchanan was a top rider but he turned the hoss busting job over to me after I showed them how I busted them. You know, a fellow that likes his job can just naturally best the fellow that works mechanically because it's a job.

"The next thing I can put a date on was starting a hoss market at Grand Island Nebraska, with a fellow by the name of Tom Bradstreet. That market is today the most famous hoss market in the world. We made it big enough together that the government bought their hosses from us for the Spanish American Fracas. After 10 years in that business, I quit in 1900 to go to making the contests only. I liked that life better anyway.

"Oh yes, I just happened to recall that I worked for the Smith Brothers up in Wesser, Idaho, between the times I worked for 8 Damron and Goulding in Denver. They run their hosses in both Nevada and Idaho and their brands were the 'JS' and the 'JC'. You know, I'm an old man and I forget more things than I can remember. If we were at my ranch office, I could give you day and date of everything I've done down to the time I was about eight years old. Of course, I don't have so much of it before I was about 15, but I have it all from then on and it makes [mighty?] interesting reading.

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"While I'm on the Smith Brothers, let me tell you of a funny thing that happened while I was working there. Cooks were scarce as hen's molars in those days so everybody had them a chink cook. Our cooky was about the laziest human I ever came across. He actually wouldn't do a thing he wasn't forced to do in order to hold his job so you can imagine how clean he was when the gang didn't care so awful much. They wanted to eat at the right time and they wanted their black coffee hot when they wanted it.

"Well, one of the young bucks suspected something was wrong about the cooking because he never did see cooky getting any water. He plays sick one day when he saw the water supply was low. While he's lousing around the chuck wagon, he sees the cooky take some water from the coonie and add to the sinker water, of which he didn't have enough. Now, the coonie wasn't nothing but an old steer hide swung under the wagon to carry dry wood in. In crossing a crick to get to the present location, cooky was so lazy that he didn't take the wood out so the coonie picked up some crick water. That water was already a week old when cooky used it.

"This makes the young buck kinda pink around the gills and he goes to the foremen about it. Well, the foremen kinda doubts 9 the ranny's word and really didn't care so awful much but because some of the others might care, he plays sick the next day. He sees cooky get all of his water from the coonie for the coffee and the sinkers too. Now, he said he didn't care about the sinker water coming from the coonie but he wanted his coffee water straight so he tells the rest of us. You know, that bunch of waddies were so mad that they tied this chink under a hoss that had never been busted and then hits him with their hats. So far as we know, that cooky is still going.

"I guess I've covered the time between my birth and the 1900's pretty well. The stampedes were a thing to be expected just as you expect a flat on a car. You'd just have them when you rounded them up into any kind of a herd. A coyote, lobo wolf, rabbit, rattlesnake, or their own pure orneriness would send them on a stomp. I never was in an Indian raid outside of a rodeo where it was put on for a show so I can't tell anything about them.

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Rustling gets worse every yearsas we go along so you can tell me more about rustling I expect then I could tell you. Only time I ever lost any beef was when a ranny cut one out and hardly nobody cared about that because a cowman realizes that you've gotta eat. They sometimes cut down a neighbor's beef anyway.

"I'd built up my hoss ranch at Snake River Valley by [?], 'til I was ready to go into the contest business for myself. I had buckers and arena hosses for sale, then I supplied them on a rental basis, then run the whole show myself. My first big one was held in the Tatersall Armory on 16th, Street, Chicago. It was in the dead of winter and the cold weather was with them. I had sawdust hauled 10 in and covered the entire floor. Then I gave passes to about 500 newsies. You know, a newsy always gets my goat because the money he makes is usually the family's support. I've known them to support as high as seven and eight on selling papers. I think it's good for a young fellow to get some hard knocks when he's a kid because it takes this jelly bean stuff out of him and makes him realize that money just doesn't come to you but you have to go after it. I've met well dressed men on the streets of Chicago and had them to ask me if I remembered him as one of the newsies I gave a pass to my rodeo.

"Back to this contest. I tacked a 1,000.00 bill on a post on one side of the front door and a \$500.00 bill on the other side as a prize to any ranny that rode one of three certain hosses. I've pulled that stunt lots of times since then and never lost but very few bills. Most of the prizes I lost were saddles and other things that didn't cost so much. The reason they didn't usually ride one of my real buckers was because I didn't offer the prize until I found that I couldn't ride him myself. When one of them was rode, it was because he had decided that it wasn't any use. Some of them were hosses that had been good saddle hosses but just went bad. Might have killed a man or two and found that they could whip one. After that, they're only good for a contest or the glue factory, or a shot.

"The biggest contest I ever put on was at Dewey, Oklahoma. This was in 1912, and the town only had about 2,000 population but we showed to 23,000 people. Where they came



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from, nobody knows. It just happened that I had the best line up there that I ever had. The best hosses and the biggest names in the rodeo business. I met one fellow there that lived over in [Oclagho?], a few miles from there. 11 He was a stage hand, or rather, he was a trick roper and worked on the stage all over the country. He also had a few bright cracks so I let him show his bag there. His bag of tricks. Next time I met him was when we were both scheduled to speak to the Adventure Club in Los Angeles, in 1932. I'd heard that he had charge of several million so I sat down across the rostrum from him because I didn't want to seem like I was fawning on him. You know, there's enough people doing that without me doing it too. Well, he got up and come over to where I was and sat down with me. He started the conversation by saying, 'Have you got any more bucking hosses?' That man was Will Rogers. Here's a picture I have of me standing by his casket in Forest Lawn Cemetary in Los Angeles. when he died in '35'.

"Well, back to the Dewey Contest. Buffalo Vernon was one of the name riders I had. He come out on Death Valley, one of my worst hosses. Because I knew the hoss, I stayed right in the arena to be on hand in case I was needed. Well, it didn't take Death Valley long to be rid of his rider. To start with, he was one of the meanest hosses I ever saw. He'd come right at you in the corral just like a mad dog with his teeth bared. The worst part was that he really tried to bite you. When he came out of the chute with Buffalo Vernon in the saddle, he was pitching the worst I ever saw him. In about four jumps, he had hurt Buffalo before he pitched him off. You see, if you didn't happen to be set for the come-down, you'd have your guts busted out or a misplaced fin. Man! You had to know your business and Buffalo was one of the best riders of that day but he let Death Valley get him out of position and he was badly hurt before he came down. Then, it was no trouble for Death Valley to throw him. After Buffalo hit the ground, Death Valley turned around and made for him, aiming to stomp 12 him right into the ground.

"As I said, I was in the arena so I whipped my hoss over to the two and my hoss knocked Death Valley over when he was poised right up over Buffalo Vernon. If I'd been a second later, Buffalo would have been mince meat. As it was, he was laid up for quite a spell but

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he couldn't have got to where he was in the contest business if he hadn't of been tough. In later years, he won a beautiful saddle at Cheyenne, Wyoming, for riding a buckner that had never been rode.

"There was another bad hoss in my remuda by the name of, 'Idaho Bill's saddle hoss'. He was a saddle hoss that had gone bad and a rancher gave him to me because he didn't want to kill the animal. The rider that was to ride him was a good one but was little known in those days. He has since made a name for himself and is now in the movies. He was Hugh Strickland. My arena hoss, Vera, and I were out there to help Hugh just as we had just helped Vernon if he was unlucky enough to do what Buffalo had done. Well, Hugh was thrown and the hoss was making for him when I rode in and picked Hugh up. I carried him to the corral fence and put him over, then we went on with the rodeo.

"The next place we went to was Fort Bliss, in El Paso, Texas. Word had gotten to me that Hugh had said, 'I'll ride him, fair or foul'. Well, Hugh was mad because he had been thrown but you never could tell about a new man. I wouldn't suspect him today at all because he has proved up but I decided to snub off for him and the saddle hoss myself. We had a good crowd and everything was going fine. Another puncher was helping Hugh while I held the hoss to the snub. After Hugh mounted, then hell popped! That hoss got away too soon and [?] stomped me right into the ground. They carried me off 13 the field for dead and the show went on. [Well?], I'm still fooling a lot of people. I was a long time getting over it but here I am, a good man if I wasn't so old.

"I sold all the rest of my hosses except one that was called, 'Carrie Nation'. She was a mare and was named for the old woman that went around busting up things. Oh yes, I kept Vera, my arena hoss too. [Well?], Carrie was an old decrepit looking mare. She was nothing but skin and bones but had made me lots of money because I had green horns to ride her. They always thought they could surely ride her because she was so old. The punchers that went with me from place to place always played a trick on the new hands that came in. They'd say, 'You ride that old mare 'til you get caught on [?] the rest of the

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remuda!. I forgot to say that this happened before our parades. [We?] always put on a parade in each town where we got permission to do it. The green horn would mount old Carrie, then get tossed off so pretty. If they had any spunk, they'd go back two or three times because it just didn't seem possible that she could do that. She looked like she was about to [cave in?]. More than half of the new men would leave us because they figured that if the oldest hoss was so bad, then the young ones would be bad for sure. While, I wasn't very strong for this treatment, I stood for it because all the rest of them would leave if I took their fun away from them. They'd stand around and laugh for a week after one of these stunts. We got new hands nearly everywhere we went because they all wanted to be a bronc stomper.

"Well, I pastured old Carrie out and decided to just rest awhile. I takes Vera and rides over into Old Mexico. While I was riding around in the mountains of the State of Chihuahua, I looks 14 back and sees what looks to be about the biggest grizzly bear that I ever saw in my life. Well, in my time, I had roped Lobo wolves on my hoss ranch and sent them to the Lincoln Park in Chicago along with the big hosses you'll see there when you go to the park. Then too, I'd roped catamounts, panthers, and most anything else that a rope would loop so I decides to take this critter.

"It so happened that I'd taken the precaution of taking two ropes with me on my mountain trip because I thought I might need them, having had to use a rope before when I got in a tight on a high place. Now, a good lasso will hold more than an ordinary rope. They are treated some way or other, or built different to stand extra weight because they are stronger than an ordinary rope. Well, I snubs one rope to the trunk of a tree, and takes the loop across the path to another tree where I snubs the other lasso to the tree's trunk. I climbs up and gets in a position to drop the loop right over his head.

"Now, a bear can scent a person a long ways if the wind is toward him but if the wind is like it was that day, he wont know you're close until the damage is done. When the critter got right under me, I looped him pronto, then hell broke loose! I beat him to the punch by

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dropping to the ground, then leaping to one side after looping him again with the other lasso. Since the first was snubbed close, it was an easy matter to draw my second loop up tight before he had any idea what was happening. I had him standing up with both ropes tight. If he moved any way, he cut off his own wind. Man! Man! Was that bear mad!?

“The next thing I done was to get Vera and light out for that town at the base of the mountain with the unpronouncable name 15 and buys an old international truck. After I told several Spicks that I wanted them to help me load a bear into a truck, there was a labor shortage. I couldn't hire anybody for love nor money. Well, that made it tough but I'd got so far with it and I was going to see the deal out. I goes back up the trail and had to cut quite a bit of the trail to get there.with the truck.

“I'd bought me half a dozen lassos while in the town so I had enough to handle the critter. I sure was afraid that he'd get away while I was gone but when I rounded the bend on the ledge, there he was and pretty droopy. I guess he'd had to stand there for about four hours, or maybe a little less, so he was getting tired. Everytime he moved, he cut his wind off and he didn't like that all so I figured that the way to handle him was to keep his wind pipe tight, then he'd be pretty easy to handle. Do you know, right when I thought I'd won the fight for sure, and almost had him tied in the truck pretty good, he gets a chance to reach me with a paw and puts this scar on me. You see there, it reaches from my hair down to a little above my lip. I thought I'd bleed to death before I got it stopped with pushing the edges of the cut together and holding it with my bandana. I then took some strands of a rope and tied the bandana to the place but had holes cut for my eyes.

“After I got down to the town, I got the doc to fix me up. All the way down, the bear was raising hell because he had smelled blood. He kinda let up after I got fixed up but he still didn't like the fix he was in. When I decided to light out for the States, he was getting pretty well used to being tied up and I was feeding him pretty well. 16 “After I got into Elpaso, all the fellows on the press said I ought to give him to the president. Well, I'd kinda liked the way Harding carried on before I got hurt so I decides to do it. He weighed the critter and

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after we took off enough for the truck, he weighed about 700 pounds. Now, you can see what a catch I'd made. I lit out for Washington with the bear in the truck, and by the time I'd got to Washington, I'd found out that Harding had died so I decides to give [?] it to his secretary, successor, President Coolidge. I've got a picture of him and me on the White House lawn with the bear tied up between him and me and he's smiling. That's something pretty rare for him to smile. He decides against keeping the bear for a pet so he gives it to the zoo in Washington and it's there today with a card on the front of the cage telling all about it.

“Well, I got out of the arena end of the contests after my accident but I still kept my hand in on the supplying of buckers and arena hosses. I've sure sold lots of them in my time. One of the orders I've kept in my desk at home is an order from William F. Cody for 15 buckers and 30 arena hosses. No, here it is. I've got it with me here and you can read it. See?, that's from Buffalo Bill himself and written four weeks before his death from the Irma Hotel, the one he gave his daughter Irma, and is in the Cody Park near the Yellowstone. He died on January the 10th, 1917, and the letter is dated just four weeks earlier.

“Buffalo Bill was one of my best friends and I've had lots of them. Not all of them were on the law's side either. You know I've named them over lots of times in my life and it's nothing uncommon to have someone doubt that I knew so many. It just happens that I have always dealt in good hoss flesh and that's what most of 17 [them?] needed in their business. I've sold to men on both sides of the law. Now, here comes the catch. The men I usually sold to that were outside the law were men who had been forced there by some of the big land grabbers, or some mistake made while still just a stripling. I hardly ever mention selling hosses to a fellow outside the law but I've lived my life, 'Riding in the saddle'. When a puncher tells you that, he means that the world is his hoss and he's riding in the saddle, and if, the hoss don't like the way he's being rode, he can just try and pitch the puncher off and the puncher can tell the hoss to go plumb to hell!